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ABSTRACT

This paper presents arguments for a worldwide perspective on contemporary education, and underlines the cultural necessity of widening directions of studies in comparative education. The paper is divided into seven parts, including: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Multiculturalism and Antiracism as Pedagogical Necessity"; (3) "Assimilation or Education"; (4) "Complexity of Integration"; (5) "Social Processes and Styles of Teaching"; (6) "Toward an Unconfined Concept of Education"; and (7) "References." In recent years society has been facing introverted politics, fearful social relations, and individual and collective actions against ethnic minorities. These facts are clearly in contradiction with democratic ideals and must be addressed. Societal realities call on experts and scientists to restate their theoretical premises in a way that teachers, children, and parents have opportunities to find, within themselves, what to think, what to believe, and what to do for a better social life. (Contains 30 references.) (EH)

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# FROM THE EUROPEAN TO WORLDWIDE IDEA OF EDUCATION

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is articulated in seven parts. The first part, namely, this introduction, presents the outline of the essay. The remaining parts present arguments for a worldwide perspective on contemporary education, and underline the cultural necessity of widening directions of studies in comparative education. In the last years we have been facing introverted politics, fearful social relations, individual and collective actions against ethnic minorities. All these facts are clearly in contradiction with democratic ideals. Consequently it becomes more and more urgent to find out ideas and values able to cause a positive search for harmony amongst people, nature, infinity. Societal realities call on experts and scientists to restate their theoretical premises in a way that teachers, children and parents have opportunities to find, more likely in themselves, what to think, what to believe and what to do for a better social life.

Part two presents how the recent historical background on the state of freedom and equality in education can be both satisfactory and alarming. Satisfactory because since the end of the Second World War most of the countries in Europe have made considerable attempts to promote policies favouring educational opportunities. Alarming because Western nation-states have not been able to prevent ethnic protests (in the 1960s) and ethnic racism (in the 1990s). Thus it is pointed out that studies are available about both equality and inequality in Education.

Parts three and four illustrate how some studies in education are still restricted to Western societies. Although they have chosen broad perspectives, such as the holistic approach, it is difficult to explain how they want to improve international understanding while they are omitting the rest of the world. Pioneers in comparative education studies started with traveling abroad and they showed different ways of making comparison. Nevertheless, most of them agreed with the main aim of this kind of studies. Comparatists present arguments for and against it to demonstrate how and why educational reforms should be introduced in one or more countries. Besides, it is important to ask for more accurate definitions and interpretations of words such as assimilation, integration and pluralism, giving space to educational meanings which are not derived from political, economical, social, psychological assumptions.

In part five it is assumed that school and society are bringing about different values. In the world several systems of education pursue contents and values in their schools which

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tend to respect the traditional aims of a progressive, not coercive education. In contrast, society cultivates styles of life, beliefs, behaviours that are essentially aimed at suppressing criticism in order to maintain social cohesion and political stability. According to a dynamic concept of education, it should be possible to prepare generations capable of recognizing distinctions amongst different cultural messages because they have first made simulated experience of teaching styles' (conservative, progressive, neutral, democratic) and they can responsibly choose the one which works for a pluralistic society. Therefore, being aware of its critical and meaningful role, school should always dialogue with society demonstrating how ideas become facts and how to reformulate contents in terms more suitable to our human life. In the same part correlations between social processes and school teaching have been hypothesized.

Part six concludes that the worldwide idea of education is primarily based on the appreciation of cultures which need to be known not only evaluated. It implies big transformations of school philosophy and curricula. Besides, it is a great challenge to political reforms, school teaching, academic studies and research because they should give evidence of their pledges for the international mutual understanding. Finally, part seven contains the references quoted in this paper.

## 2. Multiculturalism and antiracism as pedagogical necessity

Since the end of the Second World War most of the countries in Europe have seriously worked in order to develop a democratic system of education based on the assumption that education was to be offered to all children regardless of social class, ethnic origin, sex, religion, nationality and in some case that principle was written into the Constitutions of some countries. In the Italian Constitution (1948), for example, it is said that: "School is open to all. Free and compulsory education lasts eight years. Talented children without means have the right to reach the highest level of studies and the Republic supports them with scholarship gained through proper applications". (art. 34)

The development of what Brian Holmes calls *Equality and Freedom in Education* (1992) was a necessity of the new society of the post-1945 era particularly in those States where the spirit of democracy had won over the antidemocratic pressures. The idea of selective and élitist school became increasingly ineffective in promoting the growth of countries and peoples both in capitalist and in communist systems, although for quite different reasons. As B. Holmes writes: "There is no doubt, however, from IBE (*International Bureau of Education*) reports that the stress on the equality of educational provision has increased everywhere and that the right to education now included access to schooling at all levels" (B. Holmes 1992, 8).

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the post Second World War educational policies did not consider adequately the social reasons for the school achievement. Relevant studies (see

P. Bourdieu, J. Passeron 1964, 1970) argued that the linguistic capital is shared inequitably amongst social classes, favouring students belonging to higher social classes. Schools, while claiming to teach all children, in fact perpetuate the social inequality: children from disadvantaged socio-cultural background are likely to achieve less in school, and the selection passes primarily through language proficiency. The sociological analysis of Bourdieu and Passeron has been used to explain the drop-outs phenomenon, to accuse school system and to justify the cause of children's underachievement. Similar studies are available on *Racial Inequality in Education* (B. Troyna 1989, B. Troyna and R. Hatcher 1992). They .draw attention to the complex nature of racism systematically regenerated in British schools.

On the field of psychological studies,illumining experiments showed how teacher expectations influence children's achievement (R.Rosenthal,L.Jacobson 1968) and the dynamic of parents-children is likely to be the same (N. Tabard 1974; W.H. McBroon 1985). Nevertheless, great educationalists such as Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Grundtvig (1783-1872), Don Bosco (1815-1888), Manjòn (1846-1926), Makarenko (1888-1939) and others started with the poor, delinquents, illiterates and the "hobo-children" as N. Anderson would say. Frequently, their pedagogical message needs to be remembered.

In the 1960s growing demands for educational opportunities caused a massive expansion of universities and other institutions of higher learning, pre-school facilities, and adult/lifelong chances.In the 1970s educational policies were antidiscriminatory in theory but discriminatory in practice. In fact rather than directly addressing the problem of the socially disadvantaged categories such as women, the handicapped, the blacks and the minorities, efforts were directed mostly to providing "special help" in schools. In the 1980s the intercultural/multicultural education was the label used for defining any moderate attempt to overcome ethnic contrasts. Differences can be noted amongst countries [1] (S. Chistolini 1992). In the 1990s studies reveal a sort of combination of inter-multiculturalism and antiracism. Antiracism in education implies an articulated educational

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1. For instance in the English pedagogical literature the notion of "multicultural education" is often used whereas in the Italian and German pedagogical semantics it is easier to find the notion of "intercultural education": "educazione interculturale" or "pedagogia interculturale", "interkulturelle Erziehung" or "interkulturelle Pädagogik". It is a fact that the adjective "multicultural" is more often associated with "society" in the Italian and German sociological literature, that is, "società multiculturale" and "multikulturelle Gesellschaft". This is likely due to a different connection between pedagogical thinking and social field, between school competence and social competence. In the Italian context, studies and research in education and pedagogy have more in common with the most traditional field of studies, such as philosophy, history, and even with psychology, rather than with sociology.

response for the creation of open minded generations. It should serve as a concrete proposal against any sad return to authoritarian personality (T. W. Adorno et al. 1950) and a structured recommendation to conduct research and studies on cultural prejudice.

**3. Assimilation or education**

Referring to ethnic revitalization, James A. Banks adopts the weberian ideal-type typology of four phases to explain the passage a) from *precondition phase* characterized by the existence of the gap between democratic ideals of the nation-state and the inequality as societal realities, b) to the *first or early phase* with combination of ardent protest, intense identity and ethnic polarization, c) from the *later phase* with the establishment of affirmative action policies, and d) to the *final phase* during which many of the reforms become institutionalized in schools and other educational institutions, the schools created "multicultural education" (J. A. Banks 1986, 1-28). Being aware of the fact that the four major cyclic phases must be seen as "approximate reality rather than directly describe it", Banks illustrates ten major paradigms: ethnic additive, self-concept development, cultural deprivation, language, racism, radical, genetic, cultural pluralism, cultural difference, and assimilationism. The Author explains the limits of the single-factor paradigms and shows how multi-factor paradigms and holism help educational reforms, school programmes and practices, in order to develop societies and peoples in a culturally diverse world.

Although interesting Bank's arguments seem to be quite weak when he talks about the reciprocal necessity of students to assimilate some of the values, knowledge and skills from the mainstream culture, and of educators to assimilate some values, ethos and perspectives of their ethnic minority students. Indeed, the process of cultural and structural assimilation does not itself belong to that concept of education which looks for the co-existence of unity and diversity. The school culture, as a "synthesized cultural system" that reflects student's and teacher's culture, already exists in the history of human beings. Thus, it is not a new creation of Western democratic societies, since it is a reality also in the societies of the past and in other parts of the world. It seems that the holistic approach of Bank tends to remain restricted to the analysis of Western societies.

Studies in comparative education/pedagogy need multiple contributions, that is, different disciplines (history, pedagogy, sociology, psychology, economics, politics, anthropology, law and others) should provide scientific data for comparisons (see G.Z.F. Bereday). This should help us to understand our cultural origins (Grecian and Latin), our historical background (Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism), religious and philosophical beliefs (Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Rastafarianism, Judaism, Christianity and others). Such an understanding of our past should provide us with arguments from all over the world in order to promote a growth of individual and collective awareness of our mixed heritage, both from a genetic and cultural point of view. As Edmund King recently said: "In

*this* island all the white people are mongrels as the result of repeated invasions, often by armies of young men who did not bring any women with them, and by centuries of immigration by skilled workers, and (for two centuries of improved transport) the internal mixing-up of the indigenous stock of peoples".

Several times politicians, historians, geographers invented discriminations between European and non-European world attributing to them different meaning and evaluation. Sometimes they were positive for the Europeans, other times they were positive for the non-Europeans. F. Chabod underlines how concepts and judgments were often depending on a specific *forma mentis*, on a feeling of belonging "we-them" which gave authority and superiority to defined culture, ethos, identity, for instance the Christian one (F. Chabod 1977, 58-66).

**4. Complexity of integration**

If "assimilation" as a "process of becoming similar" (M. Banton 1992, 25) leads to the "zation" notion, such as Americanization, Anglicization, Germanization, Europeanization, integration would be referred "to a process whereby a group with a distinctive culture (including religion) both adapts to and is accepted by a larger group without being forced to change its culture and associated practices in favour of those of the majority" (R. Miles 1992, 146-147).

Assimilation and integration are both supposing that there is a group which should make efforts to "become similar" or "to adapt to and to be accepted by a larger one". In contrast, the notion of pluralism is characterized by: heterogeneity, presence of diverse elements, horizontal differentiation, group maintenance of distinct features and identities. As E. Cashmore writes "Historically, pluralism seems to apply to preindustrial or industrializing countries like East African or Caribbean societies where there are more or less equal segments rather than hierarchical classes as in industrial societies" (E. Cashmore 1992, 216).

Since international migrations have progressively broken a certain cultural unity of Europe, we face two alternatives. The first constantly affirms that Europe has its own cultural identity not in opposition to ethnic variety. It is a strategy of this continent to legitimize the difference of national and regional cultures within a common heritage symbolized by human products of arts and science (see Maastricht Treaty 1992). On the other hand, the second alternative, broader than the previous one, is to consider unreal any project for European unity unable to confront itself with the whole meaning of that "unity" which substantially includes the rest of the world.

The Europeans have colonized, evangelized, transformed huge portions of the earth and they still intervene in international affairs. One of the latest examples is the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. In many official declarations it has been said that the pressure of the European culture played a decisive role

for the overcoming of the South African apartheid. Often they sound as devitalization of the freedom spirit of peoples living in that country. If even education discusses solely in terms of European perspectives, how would it be possible to live together with people from other continents avoiding the highly criticized assimilation, which implies renewed processes of Europeanization?

As far as I understand European education tends to be based upon concepts such as those of assimilation and integration which are, by definition, pedagogically inadequate. In other words, the logic of education needs something more than to assure social consensus.As a matter of fact, the history of education has often testified that a certain dose of innovative thinking and behaviour is essential to achieve new social targets. If we accept that,pluralism would be one of the most congruent proposal for innovative thinking.

Having said that, we can ask ourselves three fundamental questions:
1. What then is the restraint associated with the processes of assimilation, integration and pluralism in our lives and in our societies?
2. How can postindustrial societies allow pluralism to flourish without renouncing their vertical organization of human relations?
3. How far can integrative social process combine with democratic teaching?

## 5. Social processes and styles of teaching

For years sociologists have emphasized that contradictions between society's needs and school learning must be overcome. Hence, the school should prepare children to adapt/conform themselves to social standards,to be insiders,to feel integrated, to refuse deviance, to share common values, traditions and languages. Under this cohesive conception, we discover a subordinated role of school because it takes messages from society and there is little that it can do autonomously.

In contrast, the world history of education shows how educators in their environment and teachers in their schools can become strong enough to create a community where children are able to question the government, parents, structures of learning and the efficacy of teaching. I am thinking of those well-known experiences of schooling that at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century were able to launch theoretical proposals and practical reforms on education. Having examples from all over the world: from Switzerland with Pestalozzi to Russia with Tolstoy, from Scotland with Alexander S. Neill to India with Tagore, and under some regards to Italy with Maria Montessori, it seems to be scientifically appropriate to talk of them as an international movement. The aim of progressive education, amongst others, was to demonstrate how children and educators can live together and share deep human experiences providing ground for a better individual and social life.



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In several countries more styles of teaching can be revealed: conservative, progressive, neutral and pluralistic. In *conservative* teaching, school and society reciprocally adapt themselves. The school gives values and targets in accordance with social expectations, and the educative process is intended to balance diverse information annulling conflicts and disharmonies. *Progressive* teaching and school make their own proposals which can also be quite innovative compared to social tasks. The essentially *neutral* teaching considers neither conservative nor progressive possibilities, that is, the neutral school is lacking in both implicit and explicit educational policies. It is a teaching without mind or spirit, it goes with the wind. Finally, the *democratic* one considers all three chances presenting characteristics of each model in theory and in practice. In theory they explain how education can be conservative, progressive, and neutral. In practice they alternatively act as a conservative, a progressive, a neutral teacher/educator in such a way that children/students make experience of the different models. Afterwards, students can responsibly choose the preferred model useful to develop a pluralistic society. Thus, through a simple, though not easy community environment, it is possible to prefigure the future society founded on values that have already been cultivated in school. In this way school does not depend abstrusely on society but it offers its own project of a human system of life, starting from children education.

*Hypothetical correlations can be prefigured between the social processes and the styles of teaching:*

| Social processes | Styles of teaching | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | conservative | progressive | neutral | democratic |
| assimilation | + | - | + | - |
| integration | + - | + - | + - | + - |
| pluralism | - | + | - | + |

*The symbols + - show possible evolutions of integration and style of teaching towards assimilationism or pluralism. Integration can combine with all styles, in fact it is the most used in Western societies.*

**6. Towards an unconfined concept of education**

The worldwide idea of education proposes problems rather than solve them because it tries to focus on the quality of attention of European culture on the non-European one, increasing comparisons with other *Weltanschauung*. Scientists can take the challenge of searching for diversities as explanation of unity. For instance, in our Italian schools we do not study very much about India and Hinduism, but sometimes we read something of Gandhi's vision of man. A complex reality is presented in a

simple manner: a few words for an enormous change. He found a double unity: interiorly with himself and exteriorly with cultures he had experienced in Asia, Europa and Africa.

Because we are different we should look for the unity of human beings within democracy and pluralism. In all countries, examples similar to Gandhi's experience should be pointed out. We do not know them, consequently books in our schools do not mention them. Academical studies on pedagogy, history, philosophy and theology just forget them. A previous judgment has already been formulated to select what is more important to know about human production. In this regard, as motive of reflection, I would like to remember the essay written in 1953 by J.A. Lauwerys: "Les manuels d'histoire et la compréhension internationale". How far are our school books promoting mutual international understanding?

Notwithstanding, all good pedagogical intentions aimed to expand educational opportunities, contemporary societies tend to remain unequal and desire to maintain social differences. Assuming that school and society are parts of the same human system, it can be noted that while school tends to pursue utopian targets often socially not acknowledged, society tends to pursue non-utopian targets based more on economic and political principles than on ethical ones. Comparative educational approaches are required to make great efforts to bridge the deep gap between school curricula and social life, in other words between contents of school and contents of society. This discrepancy is more relevant in countries such as Italy where the tradition of manual work and the idea of *Lebenschule* seem to be less convincing both to teachers and education officials. As a result, the aim of "learning by talking" is much more stressed than the task of "learning by doing". The first one plays the role of "core subject", the essential study in the Italian educational process.

Having presented facts and reasons, I come to define two conditions *sine qua non* education is going to miss part of its roots and essence. Firstly, if what we call "education" is meant also to revitalize the historical memory of those whom we recognize as founders of this discipline, both theoretically and practically, the nature of education as individual and collective, physical and intellectual development, would be far freer than the system in which governments pretend to confine it. Secondly, if the freedom of thinking is one of the main aims of education, the pluralistic and democratic models would be the best responses to that task (see also J. Lynch 1992). Therefore, according to these statements, studies and research can hopefully be carried on discovering the strong connection between the history of human beings and the creation of thought useful to develop an unconfined concept of education which, culturally speaking, belongs to all countries.

I would like to conclude this paper recalling what Cicero said: "A wise man is friend to another wise man wherever he lives". As persons who are dealing with education, we can not avoid asking ourselves at least two questions:

1. How can human beings get wisdom, that is to say, become aware of their intrinsic, methaphysical relations?
2. Which aspects of the international concept of education - for example of Unesco and of other intergovernmental organizations of cultural and educational co-operation - should be listed in the policies of different countries and should appear in the related curricula?

From these issues a new pedagogical analysis could start.

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